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In loving memory of my parents Karl and Toni Rajninger  
To my dearly beloved daughter Michele, and her husband Rudy  
To my dearly beloved son Steve, and his wife Lara  
To my dearly beloved grandchildren Joshua, Talia, Jacob . *TOMI, JERICHO.*  
To Eva, my first mate on board  
To life







Eva and I wish to commend our children for all their accomplishments.  
We wish them a long, happy, purposeful and prosperous life.  
We feel blessed.

Leon and Eva Rajninger









Chernowitz, Romania before the Holocaust, 1931-1939. These are the pictures that were in the garbage can from 1941 until 1944. Leon's growing up years and his parents Toni & Karl Rajninger.







## The Black Days and Nights

During the closing months of 1939, the Second World War broke out. Poland had fallen and was occupied by the Nazis. Forced by circumstances to get away from the Nazis, people used any kind of transportation they could muster: everything from trucks and cars to motorcycles, bicycles, three-wheel carts, and horse drawn wagons. The vast majority of people fled on foot, walking in long columns with their belongings in suitcases and bags. Refugees crowded the streets, parks and available open spaces, seeking food. My mother prepared huge pots of soup and fed as many refugees as she could. When our turn came, we had no place to run. All the doors were closed to the Jewish people. It felt like the world had sealed our fate for doom. Until 1914, Bessarabia was part of the Tsarist Empire. The murder of 49 Jews during the Kishinev pogrom in 1903 had led to protest demonstrations in London, Paris and New York, and a letter of rebuke from Theodore Roosevelt to the Tsar. In 1918, the region became part of Romania but remained strongly anti-Semitic. The city of Kishinev was the center of the Jewish agricultural community that thrived throughout the province.

With the return of Soviet rule to Bessarabia in June 1940, all Jewish institutions were closed. On June 13, 1940, most of the Jewish leaders, as well as wealthy Jews, were exiled to Siberia, where many died. Bukovina was also occupied by the Russians in June 1940. Our world changed overnight.

The day after the Russian occupation we had to stand in line for a loaf of bread. I always went along with my mother. Every morning we got in line about 3:30 a.m. to wait for a government controlled store to open. But by the time it had opened and the first ten or fifteen people had purchased bread, the manager would come out and say he was sorry, but there was no more bread, and we would have to come back the next day. It took three days to buy one loaf of bread per family. The store managers sold all the other bread on the black market for profit. All privately owned stores had closed and there were only a few government stores open. Given the prevalence of black marketeering, there was no merchandise to be had. My father lost all his clients: some fled to Romania, others were exiled to Siberia. There were no rubles to be had, no work. Then my mother and Aunt Loti started to sell and buy used furniture from people escaping to Romania. My mother sold them to the present rulers that came with the occupation and we adjusted to our new life. This though did not last long.

With the arrival in July 1941 of the Nazi killing squads the scale of murder exceeded anything previously known: seventy to one hundred people a day from mid July to mid September. Another 124,632







perished in deportation from Bukovina and 148,000 more died following their forced removal from Bessarabia. In Transnistria, there were hundreds of death marches. During these marches more than half of the victims died of exposure, disease, hunger, thirst and the savage brutality of the Romanian and German guards, who would often select groups of marchers, order them aside, and shoot them.

Let me tell you now our Holocaust story.

The Nazi soldiers forced most of the Jewish men to do hard labor and then executed them. Soon after they began seizing the men, my father disappeared for hours. He was taken from the street. My mother was frantic with worry because we did not know where he had gone. While I was playing in front of the house, I saw a whole group of Jewish men escorted by German soldiers with their bayonets pointing, and then I caught sight of my father in the group. I followed and marched together with my father. I was only ten years old, but even though the German soldiers wanted me to leave, I stayed with my father. We marched down to the bridge of the Prut, about 7 kilometers. The bridge had been partially destroyed by the Russians, and my father with two other men had to carry logs as large as telephone poles to the bridge for support, and I was always by his side, to help him. That particular detail of German soldiers that guarded us felt sorry for me and were sympathetic to my plight.

Close to midnight we both arrived home. My mother's face was completely swollen from crying all day. We were very lucky to come home that day. Other groups of forced laborers were not so fortunate. One morning Romanian and German soldiers went around to the condominiums and houses seizing all the men for work and then execution. My mother put my father to bed and put a big bowl in which she had vomited by the bed. When my mother was pregnant with me, she had vomited for nine months straight, so she had an easy time of it. She put a scarf around his neck and ice cold pack on his head and a thermometer on the nightstand. When the soldiers came in, she told them that my father had an infectious disease, and they left. And so my father was saved again!

In the beginning of September all Jews were compelled to evacuate their residences and move to a ghetto in Chernovitz which was designated as a holding station. At the same time the order was given that all Jews had to wear the yellow star. The ghetto happened to be in the area where my mother's sister Regina Scherer lived with her family. Aunt Loti also moved to the Scherer's, so all three sisters and their families could be together. To keep us as calm and orderly as possible, Nazi and Romanian officials told us we would be getting farms in the Ukraine and would be able to live there until the end of the war. The three sisters baked bread and made a sack for each of us out of old sheets. We hung them around our necks with the bread in front, so we could keep a







watchful eye on our food at all times. The bread was the only nourishment we would have to survive the journey. We were each to have one backpack and a bag of bread. Before leaving my mother went to the end of the building where there was a metal garbage can with a lid. There she placed the pictures that appear in this book and other papers and photographs from my childhood. That was in 1941. When we came back to the Scherer's house in 1944 my mother went back to the same garbage can and took out all the pictures. The can had been left undisturbed because the ghetto was deserted from the time of the Jewish deportation to the Russian liberation.

The night before leaving Chernowitz, none of us could sleep. We were packing, and we had to choose which piece of clothing would be most useful and decide if it was valuable enough to trade for food. All the bread packs were ready. We did not know where we were going or what was to become of us. At 4:30 a.m., the soldiers were herding us out of our houses and onto the street. It took most of the day until we were assembled and ready. We stood most of the day and we became hungry and thirsty by late afternoon. We marched to the train station, which was about five kilometers away. The train with the cattle cars was waiting for us. It had approximately twenty cars. We were crammed into the cars, about eighty of us in each car, close to two thousand people total. There was room to stand but little to sit. They handed us two pails of water, and one man was chosen to monitor the car. If any person was missing or out of order the monitor would be held responsible and executed by the officers. Then the Romanian guards sealed the cars. On each end of the car, there was a very small window with barbed wire. That was the only light we had. When we heard the impact of the doors being shut with such force, we feared our end was near. We felt a mixture of helplessness, hopelessness and a very basic need to survive.

Now we had to start rationing our dry bread supply, not knowing how long we were going to be locked up in the boxcars. We also had to ration our water supply, using only a limited amount for drinking. One corner of the cattle boxcar was chosen for personal needs, and it was divided by a blanket for privacy. Because the pail we had was too small, everything spilled out onto the floor. There was very little air, so the odor spread. Free from all social constraint, the young people gave way openly to instinct; the rest pretended not to notice anything.

There were people of all ages in our boxcar, from newborns to the very elderly, and despair was pervasive. People were ready to give up on life. We lost all shame and self esteem. All that anyone had done or been was no more. Many people contemplated suicide and a few choose to die at their own hands. It took us four days to cross Bukovina and Bessarabia.

As we arrived on the Bessarabia side of the river Dniester, all the cattle cars were opened. Every five feet, there was a Romanian Guard with his







rifle and bayonet pointing at us. By that time, our hopes were already gone. It was a long jump from the boxcars. Many people were weak. People were separated from their families. People yelled for their fathers and mothers. Everyone tried to find a family member or friend. One mother threw her baby in the bushes, hoping a farmer would be able to save the baby. Some did not emerge from the boxcars.

One generation must remember the other generation, especially the generation of the Holocaust. It is a Mitzvah to always remember.

Please say Kaddish!

We had arrived in a border town called Atachi Bessarabia, the last station in Romania. It was a place of endless mud. My father had been carrying a blanket for the three of us. When we got off the train, he threw the blanket away, because he felt we were destined to die. I picked up the blanket and put it on my backpack. It was for me a time of growing up, instantly. Most of that day was spent waiting by the edge of the water for the ferry across the Dniester. It was a primitive barge constructed out of logs that could only accommodate 30 to 40 people at a time, so we had to wait in turn to cross.

We regrouped by nightfall in Mogilev-Podolsk. By the time we all crossed into the city of Mogilev-Podolsk, we were exhausted, thirsty and hungry. We were all crammed in an assembly room. That night there was no room to sit or lie down. We saw the end was near. Some were crying, but for all those people crammed into one room, it was very quiet. Everyone was preoccupied by his or her own thoughts.

In the early morning we were all lined up for the march into the Mogilev-Podolsk camp. As we started to march with many armed Romanian soldiers guarding us, our family was to be the last in line. A young Ukrainian boy was passing us pulling an empty two-wheeled cart. My mother asked the soldier guarding us if we could put our backpacks on the cart. After ten packs the cart was heavy to pull and by then there was only one soldier guarding us. We were about fifty feet behind the rest of the group. The Mogilev-Podolsk Jews were standing by the roadside, warning us not to continue on our journey. My mother gave the soldier some money as a bribe. Bless him, he looked the other way, and we grabbed all the bags from the cart and escaped into the crowd. We lived with a Jewish family for a few weeks.

When the Romanians reoccupied their lost territory, the Russians departed Chernowitz in a hurry, leaving all the stores open and abandoned. At that time my cousin Max retrieved many boxes of sewing needles, in all different sizes and beautifully packaged. Those needles were very valuable to us at this time.







It was too dangerous for the adults to venture out of the house, because they were sure to be apprehended. As youngsters, it was safer for me and my cousin Max. There was an open farmers' market held each day across the way from where we were staying. Everyday we sneaked between the farmers' carts, constantly moving so as not to be caught. We traded the needles with the farmers for bread and whatever other food they had to offer.

My mother and aunts began to fear the Nazis would apprehend us. They took a dangerous and courageous step and went to the German headquarters in Mogilev to beg for mercy. They spoke with Captain Heitzmann, an older officer who had been wounded. He had two young sons on the front in Stalingrad, and he had had his fill of the war and fighting. He said, "Here you will surely die. Pray for my sons, that I can see them one more time before I die. I will send you to a place where you and your family will survive." He asked us to be there at 4:30 a.m. and said that he would furnish a truck for us. The three sisters and husbands had a very hard choice to make that night: do we trust a German officer? They worried about us children, but there was no alternative. We stay and die or we take a chance. Their intuition about this particular officer was good. He was human and still had feelings.

We were not familiar with the area and aside from my mother and her sisters' one visit to the headquarters, none of the adults had ventured out on the streets of Mogilev. In addition, it was a war zone with a curfew and German soldiers everywhere. On our way to the headquarters it began to snow heavily, camouflaging our journey from patrolling Nazi soldiers. Maybe that was our manna from heaven, because it gave us good cover. I can see it as clearly as though it were today: we ran from door to door, hiding in between. It was another miracle that under all these conditions, we found the place and were not discovered by the soldiers until we arrived there. We could hear them talk and walk. There was a fence that was partially falling down and all ten of us laid down under it. After a while a young German officer came out of the building and asked us: "What are you Jews doing here?" We said we are supposed to meet Captain Heitzmann. Fortunately, the Captain kept his word and sent us in a truck manned by a German soldier to a small Ukrainian Jewish ghetto 60 kilometers from Mogilev called Djurin. The ghetto consisted originally of 3,500 people. After arriving, we lived a few days all in one room. Thereafter my Aunt Regina, Samuel, Max and Mark moved to the center of the ghetto.

My mother and her sister Loti were inseparable and we found an empty house that had one room with the second room blocked up by a brick wall. After a few weeks of starvation, my mother and Aunt Loti became ill with typhus. My mother survived. Aunt Loti died. Her son Eli (Leon) Fischman who was tended by his father and my mother, also had typhus but eluded death. He has lived with his wife Mira in Israel since 1946. They have three children: Roni who is married and has two children lives







in Capetown, Africa; Tali who is presently single lives in Richion Le Zion, Israel, and their son Shai lives with his wife and four children in Jerusalem.

My mother brought Eli and Mira to the United States four times and they stayed in her house for a number of weeks each time, with all expenses paid.

Let us turn back to Transnistria, Djurin. There was a kitchen where around noontime each day, they handed out one bowl of soup per person. When you were lucky, there was a small piece of potato floating around in it; otherwise it was only hot water. It was quite a ways to walk and we were already too weak to go. Many people just lay on the floor of the Schul, got swollen and died. Within a few weeks, most people in Djurin died from typhus. Shortly after we arrived, the heavy winter started. We had no clothes and no shoes for that kind of weather. My father had with him some barber tools and when he had enough strength we would go out from the ghetto into the villages and try to earn some bread or whatever the farmers would share with us. Most farmers remembered the *Holodouka*--the starvation of 1930, and they felt for us; they saw our plight. I never let either parent go alone. We would go from house to house asking what they could spare for us, and I must say they were very forthcoming!

We lived up on a hill and the only water pump was by the river. It was very hard to get water up in winter. By the time we reached the top of the hill there was very little water left in the bucket, so for most of the winter we just opened the door and scooped up a bucket full of snow. If we had some wood we would boil whatever we had, like sweet beets or a potato. The first winter of 1942 was by far the worst for us, with losing my aunt and having typhus. We were all swollen from hunger, sitting in the dark with only one small window that was covered with ice and snow. In addition, we had a big problem with lice in the winter. My parents and I slept on a few boards elevated from the floor. We had only one blanket and my father's coat, which was very warm but had a lot of lice and was difficult to clean. Unfortunately there was no choice, because it was very cold, especially at night.

The blanket was filled with cotton, and on Friday nights, when we had the necessary supplies, my mother made shabbat. We needed oil, and did not often have any, but when we did, my mother would scoop out the middle part of the potato for us to eat, remove some cotton from the blanket and pour oil in the opening of the potato. It was a big problem to obtain matches, but then, everything was difficult to get. Counting the days to shabbat and saying the prayer over the makeshift potato candle was the only way to keep track of time. Eli's father Isidor was trying to follow the war, but we had very little hope for our future. Mainly we just tried to get through each day!







One day an order came from the German Headquarters that they needed Jewish men to work on the Bug bridge. Very few men ever returned because after the hard labor and lack of food most got weak and sick and they were all lined up and shot. Our house had a brick wall between the rooms and the back of the house was totally cracked, with pieces missing from the stucco. I opened up a big piece of wall and made a hiding place in such a way that nobody would know that there existed an opening into which a person could crawl. And that day when the Romanian soldiers were sweeping the ghetto for men, I hid my father and four other men. But a neighbor that lived in the back of the house saw this through his window and when they came to take him, he pointed to that wall in the back of our house and the Romanian soldiers came right after my father and the other four men. I remember it was a moonless night, very dark, and as the guards and my father and the other men came around the alley and passed our front door, my mother pulled my father in through the front door and slammed it shut, not seeing that there was a Romanian guard behind my father. The soldier burst right in and grabbed my mother and threw her to the floor. On a table near the door we had a large kitchen knife. I was afraid he would shoot my mother, so I backed up to the table and picked up the knife and held it behind my back. It was very lucky that no other soldier entered because by this time I was only two feet from the soldier. Luckily he let my mother go! I backed up and released the knife, unseen, onto the table as he took my father away. At the time, I was eleven and a half years old. They assembled all the men in the middle of the ghetto and then marched them down to the Romanian post, which was surrounded by a tall fence. And now, the two of us could see my father from the fence. We were the only ones there. They kept them standing for four hours before they shipped them out. All this time, my mother and I were crying. It was getting late in the afternoon and they marched to the train station. We remained at the fence crying for another hour until it got really dark. We thought we would never see him again. Four weeks later, for what I think was the only time, they had too many men and shipped them back. That again was a miracle.

In the summer, it was much easier for us to survive. We could go through the cornfields and get to the farmers unnoticed. Also, in summer, I went to the river every day, which was helpful for staying clean. Almost every second day, I went by myself through the cornfields into the woods, which were about five kilometers away. I traded a bundle of twigs for a sack. I cut the sack open, attached crossing bar twigs, and then tying a long pole to it, constructed a makeshift net. I waded in the water and let my so-called net land on the bottom of the river. I had no bait, but after ten minutes I would pull up the sack, which was full of water and very heavy. Sometimes I would find in the sack two to four fish, about two to three inches long each. I tied a can to my waist and by the end of the day, not only had I had a bath and kept clean, but I also had three quarters of a can of fish, which my mother then chopped up whole so there would be no waste, and made into







patties. We had a very good meal. That was probably all the protein that I had in two and a half years.

In the woods, I picked up dry twigs and tried to find pine cones, because they burn very easily and give off a lot of heat. I also stored them for the winter: all the extras went under our bed. That was our backup storage supply, especially for the long winter months. In the woods, I never saw any animals: no deer or rabbits, not even birds. I am sure that if I had I would have found some way to trap them for our food supply.

My mother landed for a second time in the so-called hospital. She was very weak, and I knew that she needed additional nourishment to survive. It was heavy winter and everything was snowed in. My mother had a peasant friend, a wonderful lady, who was always ready to help, but the only way to get there was to go to the middle of the road, and even that was knee deep with snow. I had no shoes, just rags on my feet, so it was hard to put one foot down and even harder to bring the other foot forward. All the farmers were prepared not to go out of their houses during the harshest weeks of winter. While I was trying to make my way, a farmer came out to the front door and called to me: "Young boy, you will never make it!" I hollered back: "I will make it! I will!" and I did. As soon as I told my mother's peasant friend about her condition she went out to the shed, killed the biggest chicken she had, and gave it to me. I put the chicken under my shirt. I needed my hands free to maneuver back to the ghetto. I used my hands and feet to scale the snow, which continued to fall. When I came back, my father cooked part of the chicken. We kept it only for my mother. Right when it was finished I brought it down to the hospital. I could not go in because everybody had typhus. They took it by the door and I went around to see my mother from the window. They gave her the food. I did not leave until she had finished.

We did that every day until the chicken was gone. But soon after, I contracted typhus and became very ill. My father took me down to the hospital, but by that time I was very sick. I told my father not to tell my mother, for fear that if she knew, she would never recuperate. They had no room for me, and they figured that I did not have long to live. It was a very harsh winter and they could not bury their dead. I landed in the room where they were keeping the unburied bodies. There must have been twenty corpses. They placed me in a bed that looked more like a crib. I remember there was one very large middle and two smaller side windows, all without glass. The snow came about six feet into the room. The snow was up to the window and blowing inside. All the bodies were placed against the walls, and I was in the middle of the room. I was there five days. Nobody came to check on me: they were sure that I had died. I was lying in a pool of feces with a temperature. I was not awake much. On the fifth day, while awake, I was looking out the window, hoping for somebody to pass by. My father passed the window to go to my mother, not knowing where I was. I called out: "Please Daddy, take







me home." As soon as he heard my voice, he went to the nurse and had me checked out. Even though he was very weak himself, he carried me all the way home. I slowly recuperated, but that was our worst time of starvation. The two of us lived for six weeks on eight large sugar beets, the last of our supply.

In the fall when all the farmers were required to contribute to the German war effort, much of the food from the communal farms was loaded onto wagons, full to the top with sugar beets. At 5:00 a.m., I was on the road placing rocks strategically. Since the roads were dirt, I could place the rocks on the wheel tracks in such a way that the wagons would shake on one side and beets would fall down onto the road. I always placed the rocks at a bend in the road; I would run out, unseen, and collect the beets before the next wagon came. The soldiers guarding the wagons did not see the spills. I hid the beets in the bushes, and usually by the end of day, when there were no more guards, I would have a sack full. My mother would cut them like noodles and make borscht from one beet. Most of the winter, we had some beets saved under the bed. I also crawled into the fields where the potatoes were grown. The farmers did not bother to take the small ones. In a few hours, I could collect a bucketful; that too we stored under the bed for winter. Winter was very difficult to survive!

My mother had a sister who had immigrated to Beira, a city in Africa, and married a very handsome fellow. But every few weeks, he would have a new girlfriend, and Frieda was very jealous. Once a year, even though she was anxious about leaving her husband, she felt obligated to come and visit Chernowitz, where all her sisters and other family lived. But she was not quiet about her marital situation, and always wanted to know who her husband was seeing. We had many fortune tellers in Chernowitz, and she would go to all of them, always taking my mother in tow. That was where my mother got the idea of telling fortunes for the Romanian guards and their sweethearts. She was very smart and good at it! The cards are still in my possession. A doctor's wife, who was a good friend of my mother, gave her the cards. The farmers too came to hear their fortunes. But that was already near the time of the liberation.

My mother profited from her fortune telling, and shared what she could with a number of other families. But this was for a short time only. After the war, these same families came to Chernowitz. They wanted to repay my mother for their lives, but my mother was simply happy to see them--she did not want any compensation. Toward the end, we heard that an S.S. unit coming to kill us all, but the partisans caught up with them first.

When the partisans entered Djurin, the first thing they did was to hang the Ukrainian Guard, who was very vicious. He had killed many people. My mother and I had an encounter with him once. Deep in one village, he spotted us crossing the street. As he started beating us both with a







club I tried to take all the blows so my mother would be spared. We probably would have been killed if the farmers had not come out of their houses on all sides, watching in disgust as he beat us. At that time he stopped and warned us never to be outside of our ghetto, or he would shoot us. We were very lucky that these farmers protected us. After two days, we returned to the forbidden territory; we had no choice--to lay down and die or to fight for our lives.

Every hour of the day was a great challenge for survival: where are we going to get some food? Then the wood, then the water, and then the matches. Will we have enough wood to finish the cooking? I was infected with a lot of worms. When we had a little kerosene, my mother would give me a tablespoon every two days, and that helped to eliminate the adult worms. The challenge was every hour for survival; even death was not easy. We used the back room of the house one more time just a few days before the liberation, first by the partisans, and then by the Russian army.

One day, shortly before the liberation, as I looked out the window, I saw a Ukrainian soldier walking on the street, leading his horse, coming towards our house. We all went in the back of the house and crawled into it. Somehow, I managed to close the gap. We heard him come in the front door, cussing about "the damned Jews," and we also heard him leave. We stayed for another hour, and then I went out to see if everything was clear. Once again, we escaped another situation of danger. The day before the partisans entered Djurin we counted 29 planes: Germans were bombing the highway that was about three kilometers away. We laid on the ground. I could feel the bombs and I thought the world was coming to an end. About one hour later, we were free.

The Romanian and German military forces had left. Afterwards, the Russian forces came. My Aunt Regina convinced my parents that we should make our way home together, and we did. My Uncle Isidor Fischman and Eli decided to wait until it was safer. They planned to come later to Chernowitz. The seven of us started walking back from Djurin, first to Mogilev. We walked with the advancement of the Russian troops and supplies headed to the front that was only a few days march away. On the road and in the fields there was all kinds of war equipment--unexploded shells and bombs, grenades, as well as many dead people and horses. We tried to stay in the middle of the road so we would be seen by the vehicles passing us. Our first night back, we stayed with a very sympathetic farmer who gave us food. He let us sleep in the kitchen, which was comfortable and warm. We had a wonderful rest. The second day was traumatic. We almost lost our lives. One Russian driver saw us dragging, felt sorry for us, and told us to get on his truck. It was full and overloaded with ammunition. We got on the truck very gratefully, but when we got to a large hill the truck went up halfway, and because of overloading and bad roads, it went out of







control, going backwards down the hill. We all jumped off of the truck and luckily none of us got hurt. For the rest of our nine day journey to Chernowitz we walked, as hard as it was.

There were all kinds of troop movements to add to the danger. There were no laws yet established and no identifications. We stayed overnight in Mogilev-Posolsk. There were German planes bombing the bridges. The Katushas were shooting across the Dniester. There were all night battles--it was almost like daytime from the blasts. We stayed with an older Jewish couple. They gave us hot tea, and one cube of sugar each for all the tea we could drink. They had no other food, but we were grateful to have a roof over our heads and safety, as much as we could get those days.

There was one bridge left to cross the Dniester into Bessarabia. After crossing the Dniester we walked seven more days. We tried to avoid wooded areas as much possible, because we did not know if there were some German troops that had gotten separated or other factions, and we tried to be in a house before it got dark. The closer we were to our home, the more strength we mustered to reach our destination. Throughout the nine days going home, my mother and my aunt talked and planned to open a delicatessen: food was the most important commodity at the time. My aunt offered to furnish the capital, which I think was 200 rubles, and my mother the labor. My mother was very good in business: everybody loved her and she was always successful because of her wonderful personality.

As soon as we arrived in Chernowitz, we stayed once again with the Scherers, while the two sisters were looking for a favorable location for the deli. After not very long they found a location on the Russische-Gasse which before the war had been built specifically as a jewelry store, made all of steel with steel window shutters, and an approximate total size of 12'x12'. They decided to sell out of a window, because they did not want the Russian soldiers to come in. Also there really was no space, so the deli was operated strictly from the window. That was quite new for Chernowitz at the time. They offered two kinds of salami: Italian and Polish, fresh rolls, bread, and dessert. They had one pastry only: Napoleon. They were very busy because the soldiers were finally getting paid for all the war years, and they had plenty of money. That little store was a great success.

My father went to look for his clients and friends, but the Russians without notice would block an entire street and take all the men and women to Siberia for work in the Russian concentration camps. My father did not come home that evening, so we went looking in all the police stations. Finally they told us that the streets were blocked and they had a lot of people to ship to Siberia. My father was one of them. We had just returned from hell. Everyday was a struggle to survive. And now again, it was heart breaking to be separated after only a few days in







Chernowitz. The Russians marched the people to the train station. I stayed with my father the whole way. When we passed by the Ringe Place, where the store was at the beginning of the Russische-Gasse, I called to my mother and she walked with us for a few blocks and then returned to the store. After an emotional goodbye, we arrived at the train station. Regular Russian army personnel were guarding all the people.

They loaded them again in cattle boxcars and then stayed for about four hours at the station. I remained the whole time with my father. My father needed to go to the bathroom, so I went to ask one of the guards, and he said it was OK: there were two toilets in the station in one corner. I told my father to sit on the toilet until the train left. I was going to stand outside the toilet and watch to see if they remembered that my father was not on the train. I would signal him if they were looking for him. When the train left we had only to cross the street and take the streetcar home. But my father refused. He was too honest, too much of an Edelmann. He went back on the train. I was always sure that they would not have missed him. But we said goodbye again, which was very hard since the future was unknown. The train had a lot of cars and it started very slowly. I ran after the train and for a long way I could still see my father. Slowly, I fell behind. The train was picking up speed, I felt completely helpless, but I still continued running until the train was too far away and all I could do was watch, standing on the tracks. I watched as though maybe the train would come back, but all I could see was black smoke on the horizon. Finally, I was totally exhausted, and night was falling. I went back into the station and stared at the toilet, hoping that my father was still there. I did not want to leave the train station. I finally went to the streetcar, went home and to bed crying.

Nine months later, we received our first letter. He had just been freed from a very hard labor concentration camp: that was the reward for surviving the war under the Germans. There were many 2:00 a.m. interrogations by the N.K.V.D., the secret Russian Police. After they found that my father had no part in the war years, he was put into the military, and since he was older he was in the Fire Department serving Nizhny-Tagil-Novaya Siberia. Their units consisted of forty men as firefighters for the entire city. Most men were on the front. Women were doing most menial and other work. My father gave the haircuts and befriended the captain of the unit, and when Saturday night came he always asked my father to go out and meet the many single Russian women, since there were no men around. Once my mother received the first letter and the good news that my father was alive and well except that the rations were not enough, since all the available food was going to the soldiers on the front. My mother sent a letter every week and in the letter one thousand rubles. On the black market my father could buy all the additional food he needed for his well-being, and black market prices were not cheap.







Ninety percent of the letters and money reached my father, and that was helpful, because my father had not yet recuperated from the German ghetto. So every time the captain asked my father to go out to meet the girls, my father always told him that he had one wife and one God and that was for life. And the captain also knew that my father was getting money and how hard my mother worked for that money. So he told my father, "Karl, the first pass I get I will give to you to go home to see your wife and son. When you have a wife like this you both deserve to be together." When the first pass was issued my father was on his way. But the captain was afraid that my father might get lost; after all, it was a long three thousand mile journey. To be sure my father got home he sent along a 25 year old Russian soldier to guide him back to Chernowitz.

My mother meanwhile worked very hard twelve hour days, seven days a week. The balance of the money left after what she sent to my father she invested in Russian gold coins, with the idea that if we wanted to escape the Russian rule, we would need to trade money for our freedom. We were living now in the condominium that my parents bought in 1930. When we arrived back from camp, we found an older crippled Christian lady living there who had a dog named Fifi, a small, very beautiful and smart animal. Before we arrived, she went every day to the open farmers' market to beg. When we arrived, she was going to move after my mother told her that this was our condominium. But my mother would not hear of her moving. She told Sofi, "Please stay, I would love that you stay, and from now on I will supply you with all you need, so you will be with us and feel like it's your own house." Sofi was very happy that she did not need to move, and Fifi was also very happy because my mother would bring him home salami every night. When the time came for my mother to come home, Sofi told Fifi: "*Die Frauerl kommt shon.*" We lived on the third floor. He would run down so fast that at times he would roll down to get to the salami. Of our neighbors from before the war, none came back. They all perished in the Mogilev ghetto.

Whenever the Russians needed people to send into factories or for different projects, they blocked off streets at random. One day the Russishe-Gasse was selected. A policewoman came up to my mother and told her to close the store because she was being shipped to Russia, which always meant Siberia. My mother was always younger looking than her age; she was at the time thirty-three years old. She told the policewoman to wait by the front door until she closed the store. My mother closed everything, and took all the money in her purse. The store also had a back door, which went into another street. My mother passed through the alley and then took the streetcar home. When she told me the story I begged her to please let the store be closed for a while until they had enough people to ship out. But in the morning my mother dressed up, and put on a very heavy scarf that covered her entire head and she went and opened the store. In a short time that same policewoman came and was very upset and wanted to know where the







young woman from yesterday was. My mother told her that she no longer worked in the store and the policewoman left, never again to return.

My aunt and uncle were also served papers and they too went to Siberia, but they came back at the same time my father did. Without saying a word, we knew that now was the time to escape. Sofi knew that by the end of the week, we would be leaving for the Polish border. Without our ever mentioning a word about our journey, Fifi was laying on our bed for three days, always crying and very sad, because he knew that we were leaving. We took along my aunt and uncle. My mother gave the gold coins to people who helped us cross the borders.

In Glatz, which was at the time in Poland, we joined a kibbutz that was part of the underground movement to send Jews to Israel. It was in an old villa in a nice neighborhood that would not make anyone suspicious by its appearance. Every night, we had new people passing through on their way to Israel. Since I was a young man, the leaders wanted to separate us and to send me to Israel first. In order to keep us all together, my mother volunteered to supervise the cooking for all the people that came through every night. She had about ten women to help her prepare the food. Most every day they made about a thousand meals. Then came our turn to go. We made it to Vienna in the American Zone, and from there, Shelichem sent from Israel guided us to the West Zone in Germany. There we landed in our first Camp: Hofgeismar in Hessen, waiting with the kibbutz to go to Israel. But the British had other ideas, and we were stuck in the D. P. (Displaced Persons') Camps.

All our clothes were made from army blankets. We were fed three meals a day but had no hope of going to Israel in the future, so my mother started to look for her sister and brother who had emigrated to the United States in 1922. My father also had a sister, Doris, and a brother, Uncle Simon. Once they found that we had survived they started sending us care packages. The whole family lived in San Francisco. Both sides of the family were very friendly with each other. My Uncle Simon went to everybody and collected clothes for us and money to send more care packages. At one time we got eleven care packages that made our life much easier, and gave us hope for a new beginning.

Thanks to the generosity of our relatives, we now had the means to pay for an operation so that my mother could have her gall bladder removed. It had caused her suffering for many years. The operation was done in Kassel, by a Professor Baumann. At that time it was considered major surgery, and nine months later she had to be operated upon again.

In Hofgeismar, we were in a camp with about two thousand people. First, in the kibbutz, we had three large rooms with the couples, which consisted of eight pairs, in one room, the single boys and men on one side and girls and women on the other side, divided with Army blankets,







and one room was for the senior group. One couple got married and we constructed a corner of privacy for them by draping blankets over boards.

The kibbutz dissolved once we found that we could not go to Israel. We found a small vacated room for the three of us. Now we started to dream of going to the U.S.A., but that was not easy. For us youngsters there was established an O.R.T. school right from the beginning. There were long tables and every four feet a vice, and each of us received a file and a piece of steel, and we had to duplicate whatever we chose to make. It took a few months to complete a piece by hand, and it had to be highly polished. For recreation, we played soccer during our free time, and ping pong at night. After a few months of staying at the vice, I decided to take some friends and go to the mechanics' school that was in a camp about 100 kilometers away by train. I received a certificate upon graduation. It was a six-month course of basic mechanics, but this was of more use than standing at the vice.

When the D.P. camp Hofgeismar was closed we were all transferred to Kassel, in a Jagger Kaserne. There we stayed in the D.P. camp for about eight months until it closed. The next stop was Landsberg am Lech in Bavaria. In this D.P. camp we stayed 1 1/2 years, still with no hope of going to the U.S. The year was 1950. My schooling ended in 1940, with my not quite finishing third grade, and there was no way to continue. In the D.P. camps we had only trade schools and that consisted of key making. They offered a basic course in electricity and much later in auto mechanics, but that was all and only in Hofgeismar. By the time we got to the other camps, the trade schools were no longer open because most people were focusing their energy on emigration.

We were not well equipped to fit into a normal society, but we were ready to take on the challenge. In Augsburg Bavaria was the consulate and the medical test that we had to pass in order to qualify to emigrate to the U.S.A. In Landsberg, my uncle Simon came to visit us, and that was for us the biggest and most hopeful event in many years. Uncle Simon was a Reininger, very handsome and very well dressed. It was a big honor to have a visitor from California. My father had not seen his brother since 1922, and now we had more hope. Many people from camp surrounded him. They all thought he was an actor from Hollywood; that's how handsome he was. In camp, my mother cooked for him the best meals, food that he hadn't eaten since he left Chernowitz. In Landsberg we lived with two families in one room and we had a corner designated as a kitchen. We prepared all our meals on one hot plate, with my mother and our roommate family cooking at different times. My uncle enjoyed his three-week stay in a pension in the town of Landsberg. Every night we walked him home. When he returned to San Francisco he talked to my Aunt Pauline and raved about us and in particular about my mother's cooking. And we stayed very close to Uncle Simon all of his life. When he got sick my mother brought him food every day. He especially







liked milk shakes, which my mother brought for him. From Landsberg, we were all transferred to our last camp, Lagerlechfield. That was also in Bavaria and under German rule it had been an Air Base and much of it was destroyed. We were there in the beginning of 1951, when we finally got permission to go the Bremenhafen. After more medical examinations, we loaded the General Bridgeford. It was still winter and the Atlantic was very stormy. We thought at one time that the ship was going to crack. We could not go on deck for five days: it was full of water.

Arriving and passing the Statue of Liberty was extraordinary. It was about five in the morning. Of all the four thousand lost souls that were on board the General Bridgeford, everyone was on deck. It was just getting light, and you could hear only the engines churning and the waves against the hull, because none of us was breathing or moving. There are no words to describe our happiness. It had been an eternity before this moment arrived. The world finally had sunshine for us on February 29, 1951, two weeks before my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday: that's when I feel I was born.

My Aunt and Uncle Pauline and Louie Speizer picked us up from the Oakland Train Station. After a three and a half day train journey, we were very glad to see them and meet them. After the exciting moments, while crossing the Bay Bridge, the Bridge lights went on and we felt a new beginning. As we arrived at their house there was all the family waiting to greet us, and from that moment on we felt at home. We had a wonderful stay with the entire Speizer family. They included Pauline, Louie, Bertha and Stanford. We lived on the lower floor of their house, and they fulfilled our every wish for the next three months.

Decades now have passed but we will always be grateful for the sponsorship provided by my aunt and uncle. The opportunity they provided through their generous act offered me and my parents the first step in a long climb toward a better life. The American dream, I was to learn, is as varied as the people who seek it, and as valuable as the effort put into realizing it.







## IN MEMORY OF THE NAZI VICTIMS IN OUR FAMILY

Dora Adler 6/14/1907-1942	Transnistria
Hersch Adler 8/1/1866-1944	killed in Chernowitz
Netty Adler-Goldberger 9/5/1896-1942	Nazi victim
Adolf Auster 1941	Poland
Leon Auster 1893-1941	Poland
Salka Auster-Steinberg 1891-1941	Poland
Steinberg from Lodz 1941	Poland
Scheindel Jeanette Auster 1889-1941	Poland
Helen Falikmann Riesel 1942	Berlin
Netty Frimeth 6/11/1900-1942	Berlin
Jacques Goldenberg 1897-1942	Chernowitz
Max Knoller and wife 1903-1942	Nazi victims
Gustas' two children	Nazi victims
Betty Lang 9/5/1919-1942	Nazi victim
Chaske (Karl) Lang 8/11/1895	Nazi victim
Gitta Lang 1939	Nazi victim
Mali Falikmann-Lang and family 9/13/1895 (all 4)-1942	Auschwitz
Dora Nagelberg--Berlin 2/9/1906-1942	Paris
Zlate (Lotte) Nagelberg—Auster 6/28/1888-1942	Paris
Malcia (Knoller) Reininger 3/10/1873-1942	Transnistria
Shaje Reininger 1908-1942	Transnistria
Shaje (Oscar) Reininger 2 children	Transnistria
All three died together on a death march	
Loti Fiscman 1908-1942	Transnistria
Isaac Djibre 1901-1944	Auschwitz

We shall always remember the six million victims, we have to speak for their suffering and the way they died.

Please say Kaddish.







## Rajninger Genealogy

When someone reads the "Family Tree" and looks it over from the beginning to its end, one should stop like a tired wanderer for restful reflection and consideration. If we neglect this, it could happen that the wrong, misleading impression will creep into our mind, telling us that we only have a dull list of numbers and names.

It must not be forgotten that every individual is an important part of mankind. We must consider that each one of these names represents a human being, a personality, a microcosm: each one with his biological, mental and spiritual heritage; each one with his or her own destiny which is determined by hundreds of different influences and partly by unalterable, eternal forces. Many volumes would have to be written in order to describe the lives of even a small number of those "average persons," to tell of their feelings, their experiences, their sufferings, the kind of life they have conducted, their behavior toward their fellow man, and how they as parents tried through sacrifice and loving guidance to bring up their children as decent human beings.

One has to be a poet to be able to narrate the tragedies in our family: how Jachet Reininger as a beautiful girl ready for marriage was suddenly struck by total blindness; how Israel Nagelberg in the battle of Zomsc on September 2, 1914 was reported as "missing" and his wife and two small daughters never saw him again; how his widow and her older daughter, Dora Nagelberg, were arrested by the Nazis in Paris (1942) and "deported" like cattle to a death camp; how Shae Reininger, with his two small children on his shoulder was sent on a death march to Transnistria, during which time all three died together of exhaustion, thirst, and hunger; how Reine Hassid's father was abducted from the street in Paris by French police and transported to a German concentration camp, and his wife and six children never saw him again. How we in Chernowitz were driven by the Romanians and Germans to Transnistria and many of our relatives lost their lives.

The observance of Mosaic laws and practice of Jewish traditions contributed to our family's ability to survive the difficulties of the past and, as the family tree shows, attained on average a remarkable longevity. I hope that in the future another "twig" on the family tree will carry on. To learn the story of one Jewish family is to learn the history of the Jewish people.



